

The paradigm of *the Mantle of the Expert* approach to meaningful education

1. The Background

The Mantle of the Expert approach is a dramatic-inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning invented and developed by pioneer drama educator Professor Dorothy Heathcote (1926-2012) in the 1980s. The term invokes the idea of learning growing like a mantle surrounding the learner.¹ Heathcote explains that it 'is not a cloak by which a person is recognized' rather '... a *quality*: of leadership, carrying standards of behaviour; morality, responsibility, ethics and the spiritual basis of all action.'² Edmiston argues that it 'is more than adopting a professional attitude to work. With Mantle of the Expert we can ensure that children are part of a community that is committed to the highest ethical standards'.³

Mantle of the Expert concerns the sociological - anthropological field of reality investigation. It is utilized as either a dramatic teaching method or a theatrical technique⁴ both of which create a dramatic environment asking from the participants to undertake expert roles across the whole spectrum of the social and historic development (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985).⁵

The approach inverts the typical teacher-to-student model of teaching in order to show how adults can work with children of any age and ability, using imaginative possibilities and conventions that are opened up through using drama, in order to develop deep and rich curriculum studies in classroom language communities.⁶ It re-frames teacher and learners in fictional roles in which they collaborate as experts in a specific field. This shared expertise constitutes the key difference between Mantle of the Expert and other dramatic approaches.

2. Basic principles

In general terms, Mantle of the Expert relies on three pedagogic structures/modes of teaching: inquiry learning, drama for learning and *expert framing* (figure 2.1), which involves children being placed as adult experts. In order for the approach to be effective it is essential that the teacher is aware and skillful in all three modes of teaching. The new element of children's active involvement asks them to look at their learning from a new perspective as it brings about a power shift within the teacher-learner relationship. Edmiston points out that 'the

¹ Aitken, V. (2013). Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning: A brief introduction. *Connecting curriculum, linking learning*, 34-56.

² Heathcote, D. (2009, August). Mantle of the expert: My current understanding. In *Keynote address presented at the International Mantle of the Expert Conference, Hamilton, New Zealand*.

³ Edmiston, B. (2007). *The 'Mantle of the Expert' approach to education*. Retrieved February 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

⁴ Papadopoulos, S. (2010a). *Theatre Pedagogy. [Παιδαγωγική του Θεάτρου]*. Athens.

⁵ Heathcote, D., & Herbert, P. (1985). A Drama of learning: Mantle of the expert. *Theory into Practice*, 24(3), 173-180.

⁶ Edmiston, B. (2007). *The 'Mantle of the Expert' approach to education*. Retrieved February 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

approach is grounded in the principle that young people learn best when their relationship to learning and teaching is more like that of experts than that of pupils in most schools'.⁷

MANTLE OF THE EXPERT



Figure 2.1. *The three teaching modalities of Mantle of the Expert*

Source: Aitken in Fraser. et al (2013)

In Mantle of the Expert children and teacher engage in activities in three different types of worlds: content world, world of expertise and client's world. Their interaction occurs in imagined communities which at the same time are framed within the classroom community (figure 2.2). This means that children and teacher live the experience of being in role as they interact predominantly in role but also out of role when necessary, depending on the progress of delivering the commission. As the teacher is now seen more like an enabler of knowledge and less as a transmitter of it, the teacher-learners relationship moves on to another level, as it becomes more trusting and dialogic. In Mantle of the Expert learning is situational and thus internalized and more meaningful compared to other current teaching practices. Instead of using the traditional teacher power-authority in demanding responses, the teacher now designs situations for learners to develop dialogue. Participants' relationships within the teaching-learning process are of utmost importance to education, because as Kidd (2015) puts it, 'Relationships between teachers and children are the bedrock of learning.'⁸

⁷ Edmiston, B. (2007). *The 'Mantle of the Expert' approach to education*. Retrieved February 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

⁸ Kidd, D. (2015). *Becoming Mobius: The complex matter of education*. Crown House Publishing.

Communities and Worlds in Mantle of the Expert

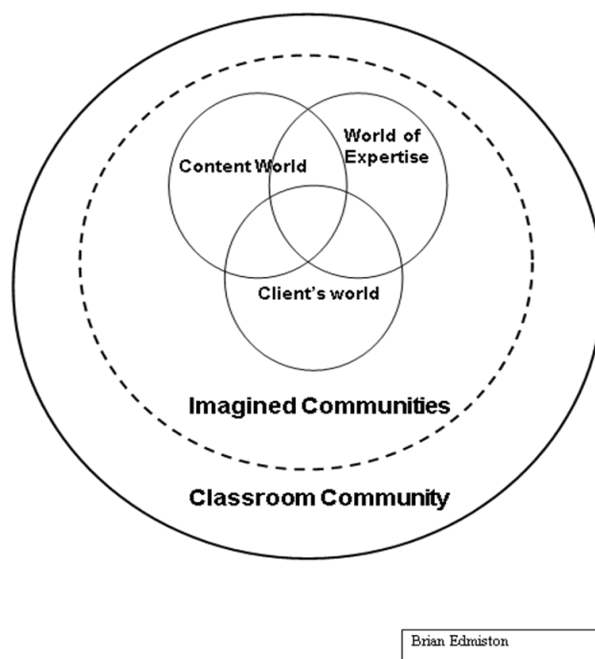


Figure 2.2 Communities and worlds in Mantle of the Expert
Source: Edmiston (2016)

3. Fundamental elements of the approach

Heathcote has identified six fundamental elements for Mantle of the Expert practice, none of which works in isolation.⁹ On the contrary, they are interrelated and combine with one another to influence learning. In fact, learning becomes an ongoing experience, purposeful and takes place within a real-life context created by the teacher in order to capture children's interest by asking the class to agree on a contract of make believe.¹⁰

Put it simply, Mantle of the Expert is about teachers and children acting as *experts* in an imaginary *enterprise* (table 3.2). This enterprise is set up in such a way that the issue under investigation is framed from a specific perspective. In this *fictional context* the challenge is to ensure that the children have something to explore rather than receive. The context is set by the teacher in such a way so as to make sense to learners, who impersonate professionals who are very good at their job and master field knowledge, undertake a *commission* with a contractual element by an imaginary *client* through theatrical roles in order to do a research project/task showing personal and social responsibility as far as running the enterprise in the fictional world is concerned.¹¹ The group's power increases through group action and the strength they draw from working towards a common goal. At some points various *tensions* arise on the learners' cognitive, emotional and intellectual level either naturally happening or

⁹ Heathcote, D., & Bolton, G. (1994). *Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education. Dimensions of Drama Series*. Heinemann, 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912.

¹⁰ Abbott, L. (2012). *The Dramatic imagination*. Retrieved February 2016 from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/The-Dramatic-imagination-draft2.pdf>

¹¹ Papadopoulos, S. (2010b). Mantle of the Expert: The Drama Project Method. [Ο Μανδύας του Ειδικού: Η Θεατρική Μέθοδος Project]. *Kinitro/Motivation [Κίνητρο]*, 11, 29-40.

intentionally caused by the teacher to keep learners engaged (table 3.1). Both commission and client must be chosen as suiting the children's interest to promote curriculum tasks within the areas the teacher wishes to focus on.¹² Thus, it becomes obvious that the issue to be investigated in Mantle of the Expert constitutes a cognitive core gaining momentum from the knowledge quest responsibility.

Fundamental elements of Mantle of the Expert

1. Fictional context	Learners and teacher agree to operate in role in a fictional context.
2. Experts	Learners are framed with expertise as a fictional team.
3. Enterprise	A fictional company/responsible team with a common goal is set up.
4. Commission	A fictional task is assigned by an external agent to learners- as-experts which frames them with responsibility.
5. Client	The external agent, who is the final judge of the finished work, is usually a fictional prestigious person.
6. Tensions	Unexpected obstacles either naturally occurring or intentionally caused by the teacher hinder the progress of work.

Table 3.1

Source: Heathcote & Bolton (1994)

Mantle of the Expert is experienced by means of a scenario where parties are involved with the whole and where thematic categories relate dynamically to the topic/issue.¹³ This means that children become research experts who use the scientific method principles and grow into the role through the tasks they undertake.¹⁴ Children 'as others' enter a world where their actions have consequences and therefore their behaviour is subject to the rules of an environment with real life conditions.¹⁵ It has to be stressed, however, that there are no real-world consequences for children's actions, merely numerous real-life learnings. Children work together with the teacher, who is considered as the most mature member of the group, as colleagues in a collaborative learning arrangement with a shared sense of purpose and a set of values¹⁶ on carefully designed tasks from within the situations rather than learn about

¹² Aitken, V. (2013). Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning: A brief introduction. *Connecting curriculum, linking learning*, 34-56.

¹³ Heathcote, D., & Bolton, G. (1994). *Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education. Dimensions of Drama Series*. Heinemann, 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912.

¹⁴ Towler-Evans, I. (2007). *What's in store in Harlow? A practical guide to the 'Mantle of the Expert' learning system devised by Dorothy Heathcote*. Retrieved July 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

¹⁵ Papadopoulos, S. (2010b). Mantle of the Expert: The Drama Project Method. [Ο Μανδύας του Ειδικού: Η Θεατρική Μέθοδος Project]. *Kinitro/Motivation [Κίνητρο]*, 11, 29-40.

¹⁶ Aitken, V. (2013). Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning: A brief introduction. *Connecting curriculum, linking learning*, 34-56.

circumstances. This task collaboration offers learners a kind of protection as they are engaged with materials which enable learning rather than explain information, a distinction which is seminal to Mantle of the Expert mode of teaching and learning.¹⁷

The way Bolton sees it, the drama teacher must be a flexible thinker.¹⁸ According to Norman it should be stressed out that the teacher does not address errors as a conventional teacher, thus freeing learners from the debilitating effects of giving wrong answers. In order for the teacher-in role to be effective ‘it is important that the teacher’s thinking never loses touch with the potential power within the most simple action. It is the teacher who challenges, gives confidence, promotes belief, sets style and builds tension so that his learners become skilled thinkers’.¹⁹ In other words, working in the Mantle of the Expert mode requires careful tasks planning. Although progression in task completion may appear somewhat haphazard to an outside observer, internal coherence, that is tasks which are internally coherent to the students in each situation, drives the planning for Mantle of the Expert work.²⁰

The eleven categories of enterprises in Mantle of the Expert

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|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Servicing enterprises 2. Manufacturing & Agriculture 3. Charitable 4. Nurturing circumstances 5. Regulatory situations 6. Maintenance enterprises 7. Arts establishments 8. Training establishments 9. Investigation, Research & education 10. Animal & Wildlife 11. Personal Services |
|---|

Table 3.2 available at <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/resources/6-key-resources/>

4. Defining the concept of role in Mantle of the Expert

According to O’Toole (1992), playing a role means stepping into someone else’s shoes so as to subjectively experience an aspect or situation of that other person. In order to achieve that, the subject has to silently define the elements and spirit of the other person’s character, accept that he is capable of undertaking the other person’s actions and thus identify with the character in that particular situation. O’ Toole’s definition makes it clear that impersonating a character in the Mantle of the Expert differs from impersonating a character in front of an external audience as much as it does in role playing and other types of simulations. Mantle of

¹⁷ Heathcote, D. (2010). *Internal coherence-a factor for consideration in teaching to learn*. Retrieved March 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

¹⁸ Bolton, G. (1979). *Towards a Theory of Drama as Education: An Argument for Placing Drama at the Centre of the Curriculum*. London: Longman.

¹⁹ Norman, J. (1981). ‘Why does teacher always get the best parts?’, *The Times Educational Supplement*. July, 32-33, p33.

²⁰ Heathcote, D. (2010). *Internal coherence-a factor for consideration in teaching to learn*. Retrieved March 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/about-moe/articles/>

the Expert is not about firm, permanent attitudes, values and opinions.²¹ Rather, as O'Neill (1995) puts it, participants are the audience of their actions and observant of the consequences of those actions. Their understanding of human behaviour is objectified through language use and gestures and is available for reconstruction and reflection.²²

5. Impact of Mantle of the Expert on learners

Bearing in mind Dewey's argument that human nature seeks motivation in direct pleasure, in what is interesting,²³ it becomes obvious that Mantle of the Expert has a multi dimensional impact on learners which can be summarized as follows:

Mantle of the Expert

- establishes research in drama role as a problem solving form. Examining reality is elaborated within drama environments, which create a world, where children cease being students and become others. Children impersonating others undertake a task. They are there in order to detect, investigate and solve problems under specific circumstances which they specify themselves.
- creates a cooperative atmosphere. It calls children as co researchers in role to collaborate setting particular targets and following particular steps. It presupposes collaborative investigation of information and knowledge construction both of which are dependent upon all characters' contribution.
- promotes active learning. It requires from children to take responsibility for their learning, which in turn helps them feel self confident, as this responsibility is based on the power of their knowledge. The teacher, choosing a drama role which can enable their research progress, becomes the knowledge quest facilitator. Knowledge is in the centre of interest and children are the co protagonists. After all, every research form requests personal involvement and in this sense teaching is transformed into a process of facilitating children's work.
- fosters team dialogue and communication. Children come closer as natural and dramatic characters. They are given the opportunity to interact and discuss with each other.
- expands the cognitive and emotional basis of social learning as it creates environments which promote the social nature of leaning.
- encourages students' cross curricular and interdisciplinary familiarizing with various subjects of the school curriculum. It allows them to explore all aspects of human experience and natural environment under professional consciousness terms. In this way, they acquire the multiple angle experience which in turn enhances an open interpretation of reality.²⁴

6. Evaluation & Reflection

In a nutshell, Mantle of the Expert creates learning environments which are fundamental to achieving optimal learning. In such environments education is less like a waiting room and

²¹ O' Toole, J. (1992). The process of drama: Negotiating art through meaning. *London & New York: Routledge.*

²² Cecily O'Neill. (1995). *Drama worlds. A framework for process drama.* Heinemann Drama.

²³ Dewey, J. (1959), *The Child and the Curriculum* (No.5), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁴ Papadopoulos, S. (2010a). *Theatre Pedagogy. [Παιδαγωγική του Θεάτρου]*. Athens.

more like a laboratory.²⁵ The approach fosters the idea *learn now-use now* as opposed to current mainstream teaching practices which are grounded on the idea *learn now-use later*. There is no doubt that play is the real substance of life as it is particularly significant in the growth of the mind.²⁶ Bearing in mind that playing in the sense of undertaking roles is the infrastructure of Mantle of the Expert, it becomes clear that this approach instills a more positive attitude to learning. After all, as Devine very well puts it, ‘What children ask for is ... an experience of school that is engaging and meaningful, that supports the learning the children need for their adult lives in a manner that also acknowledges their priorities as children’.²⁷

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²⁵ Taylor, T. (2006). *Introducing Mantle of the Expert*. Retrieved March 2016, from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/studying/articles/Intro%20moe%20-%20Lit%20co..pdf>

²⁶ Abbott, L. (2012). *The Dramatic imagination*. Retrieved February 2016 from <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/The-Dramatic-imagination-draft2.pdf>

²⁷ Devine, D. (2003). *Children, power and schooling: How childhood is structured in the primary school*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

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Resources

<http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/wp-content/resources/6-key-resources/11-Different-Enterprises.pdf> retrieved March 2016.